

Writer/editor: **Brian H. Peterson**

***Elliott Erwit: Dog Dogs***

Target audience: General public

Label type: Introductory

**James A. Michener Art Museum**

Doylestown, Pennsylvania

Label copy

## ELLIOTT ERWITT: DOG DOGS

According to the Humane Society, Americans own about 75 million dogs. Of course, anyone who has lived with a dog knows that you never really own a dog, the way you own a car or a house. Dogs think. Dogs feel. They see what's going on around them. They have their own way of doing things. Dogs also make friends easily, and aren't as picky as we are about our pals. Most dogs are affable with just about anyone, especially if there's a treat involved or a good scratch behind the ears. Which may explain why we constantly point cameras at the dogs in our lives—we always like to take pictures of our friends.

How many photographs per year do we make of our dogs? Billions? Trillions? And what do most of these photographs look like? There's Sparky with his favorite toy. There's Rover running around the back yard. We're usually not interested in understanding dogs through our pictures, or understanding the complex relationships we have with dogs. We just love our dogs, and use our pictures to remind us of how much we love them.

Elliott Erwit has other things in mind when he makes pictures of dogs. Erwit has a sense of humor, and his pictures are often laugh-out-loud funny. But he uses humor to tell us what he's observed about both dogs and people. Mostly what he sees is that dogs and people are really not that different. No great revelation there—but he communicates this so clearly, with such subtlety and irony and gentle wisdom, that his pictures make you feel like you're seeing both dogs and people for the first time. He has found a thousand ways to laugh both *at* and *with* our furry friends and their zany "owners," but he also understands the beauty and pathos of these friendships.

Erwit loves dogs—but he loves people too, and he loves the way dogs love people, and the way people love dogs. He also loves photography, and he's very good at it. You can see that in every picture.

*Brian H. Peterson, Senior Curator  
James A. Michener Art Museum*



## Juror's Choice

During the judging process, three labels inspired the overwhelming enthusiasm of a single juror. These entries are included here as Juror's Choice labels.

The writing in this label is filled with humor and expresses the writer's affection for the subjects of the exhibit, both the artist and the dogs. Although the label is long, I couldn't stop reading it, the writing just propelled me forward from beginning to end. I had to hold myself back from reading it out loud. I liked the way it sets information about the photographer within the writer's own perspectives and mixes facts (info from the Humane Society) with personal experience (the author clearly knows where to scratch his dog). I liked the writer's use of short and long sentence and different constructions to create a sense of fun. I wish I could write like this!

— Phyllis Rabineau